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SUBJECT: GERMANY: STEADFAST DESPITE DETERIORATING SECURITY
SITUATION IN NORTHERN AFGHANISTAN

Classified By: ACTING POLITICAL MINISTER COUNSELOR STAN OTTO. REASONS:
1.4 (B) AND (D).

11. (C) SUMMARY: Despite the deteriorating security situation and rising death toll in northern Afghanistan, the German government has shown no signs of wavering from its military commitment there. Polls shows that more than 60% of the German public favors the immediate withdrawal of the Bundeswehr, but with most voters preoccupied with what they consider to be more pressing and important domestic issues, the Afghanistan deployment has played hardly any role thus far in the Bundestag election campaign. While acknowledging that attacks against the Bundeswehr in the north have become more sophisticated and lethal, involving at times up to 50 insurgents, Defense Minister Jung has steadfastly refused to call the situation there a "war." Nonetheless, the German MOD has taken some small steps over the past several weeks in adapting German tactics and rules of engagement to the new conditions, giving the Bundeswehr greater latitude to take offensive action against insurgents.

12. (C) German officials caution against having high expectations for what additional military contributions Germany might be able to make after the Bundestag election. In fact, they indicate that the current authorization of 4,800 troops (4,500 for ISAF plus 300 for the new AWACS mission) is probably already close to the maximum Germany can deploy. Ironically, the center-right Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union (CDU/CSU)-Free Democratic Party (FDP) coalition that may emerge after the September 27 election could be more constrained in deploying additional forces than the current Grand Coalition between the CDU/CSU and Social Democrats (SPD). The CDU-FDP coalition majority in the Bundestag would be much narrower, and the Chancellery expects that the SPD would become much more critical of the Afghanistan deployment once it is freed from the constraints of government. Whatever coalition emerges after the September election is likely to be relatively more open to making civilian rather than military contributions. END SUMMARY.

GERMANY STAYING THE COURSE

13. (C) The German government has remained steadfast in its determination to continue its military mission in northern Afghanistan, despite the deteriorating security situation there, highlighted by the June 23 deaths of three German soldiers during an insurgent ambush in Kunduz. In fact, far from stepping back or re-considering its commitment, the government went forward after the attack with its request to the Bundestag for authorization to deploy up to 300 German military personnel, including air crews, in support of the NATO Airborne Warning and Control (AWACS) aircraft mission

over Afghanistan. This parliamentary mandate was approved by an overwhelming majority of the Bundestag on July 2. Only the Left Party, which draws less than 10% public support nationally and routinely opposes all overseas military deployments, voted against the mission. Even a majority of the Greens, who have been split over Afghanistan since German Tornado reconnaissance aircraft were first deployed in 2007, supported the AWACS mandate.

MUTED PUBLIC RESPONSE

14. (C) The deteriorating security situation has also not led to any visible or active protests by the German public. While opinion polls continue to show that more than 60% of Germans favor the immediate withdrawal of the Bundeswehr from Afghanistan, this does not appear to be a salient issue for most voters and is hardly a theme in the campaign for the September 27 Bundestag election. Domestic issues, particularly those dealing with the economy, seem to be predominating over foreign policy matters, including Afghanistan. Markus Kaim, the head of the International Security Division at the German Institute for International and Security Affairs, told us that he was surprised at how resilient the German population had proven to be in the face of the growing German death toll. He said he would not have predicted that Germany could sustain an operation that has, since 2001, cost the lives of 35 soldiers and policemen, the fourth-highest national total, behind the U.S., UK and Canada.

NOT A CAMPAIGN ISSUE

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15. (C) It is also notable that most German politicians have refrained from trying to exploit the June 23 attack -- the single deadliest against the Bundeswehr in more than two years -- for electoral advantage. Some members of the CSU, the Bavarian sister party of Chancellor Merkel's CDU, reiterated their calls for an "exit strategy" shortly after the June 23 attack, but have not followed-up on this demand since FM Steinmeier, the SPD Chancellor candidate, rebuked them publicly for acting "irresponsibly." The Left Party made "out of Afghanistan" one of its main campaign themes during the June 6 European Parliament elections, but garnered only 7.5% of the vote. Having apparently concluded that Afghanistan is not the vote-getter they hoped it would be, they have been relatively quiet on this issue since then.

CHANGE IN THREAT ENVIRONMENT IN THE NORTH

16. (C) German officials say that over the last year, the threat environment in the north has evolved from individual suicide bombings and "hit-and-run" attacks, to sophisticated ambushes involving coordinated IED strikes and the massing of up to 50 insurgents. In June, for the first time ever, German troops had to call in close air support (CAS) and request the dropping of ordnance to rescue an ANA unit and its Belgian Operational Mentoring and Liaison Team (OMLT), which were pinned down by insurgents and running out of ammunition. While admitting that recent developments are "worrisome," our contacts at the Chancellery, MFA and MOD have been reluctant to concede that this constitutes "a new quality" in the insurgent campaign, arguing that the tactics and weapons used are essentially unchanged. There seems to be a concern that acknowledging "a new quality" in insurgent attacks will contradict the government's long-standing mantra to the German public that the Bundeswehr's mission in Afghanistan remains stabilization and reconstruction.

"WAR" DEBATE

17. (C) Nonetheless, the death of the three soldiers has reignited an old public debate about whether the conflict in Afghanistan should be characterized as a "war." While Defense Minister Jung has finally come around to using the

term "fallen" to describe German soldiers who die in Afghanistan, acknowledging the combat conditions there, he has steadfastly refused to call it a "war." He and other officials have offered a variety of arguments against the term, including that war can only exist between two states and that declaring "war" could remove any inhibitions that the "criminals" and "terrorists" might still have against attacking German forces. Media reports have pointed out that other possible negative implications of using the term "war" include activating the war exclusion clauses in the life insurance policies of soldiers serving in Afghanistan and requiring Chancellor Merkel to assume command of the Bundeswehr from the Minister of Defense, as provided in the German Basic Law.

18. (C) Meanwhile, the German media is full of reports that Bundeswehr soldiers in Kunduz resent the reluctance of German politicians to acknowledge the true nature of the circumstances in the north, which many of them personally regard as "war." There is also indignation that the system of military justice has not adapted to the deteriorating security conditions. For example, German soldiers involved in shooting incidents in Afghanistan under combat conditions are still subject to investigation and prosecution by their local state prosecutors back in Germany, who may or may not understand military operations or the context in which the incidents occurred. Thus far, attempts to improve the situation by designating a single state prosecutor who would be charged with investigating all cases involving military members deployed overseas (for example, the state prosecutor in Potsdam, where the Bundeswehr Operations Command is located) have failed to get traction.

SMALL STEPS FORWARD ON RULES OF ENGAGEMENT

19. (C) Notwithstanding the continued reluctance to call Afghanistan a "war" or to concede a "new quality" in insurgent attacks, there have been small steps taken in adapting German tactics and rules of engagement to the new conditions. In April, the MOD deleted a long-standing "clarification" to the ISAF rules of engagement which

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specified that for German forces, "the use of deadly force is prohibited for as long and as far as there is no current or imminent attack." While our contacts at MOD have played down the move, claiming that the clarification became obsolete long ago, it does give the Bundeswehr greater latitude to undertake offensive operations. A new willingness to take the initiative against insurgents was demonstrated in May, when the Bundeswehr, in a joint operation with the Afghan National Security Forces, tracked down and captured a noted Taliban leader in Badakhshan (Abdul Rizaq). Before, the Germans would have left it up to Afghan authorities to take (or more usually, not take) action against an identified insurgent.

110. (C) The new approach is also reflected in new standard operating procedures (SOP) for how German patrols are supposed to respond in the case of an attack or ambush. Previously, the SOP was to drive through the kill zone as quickly as possible and to return to base. Now, the SOP is to engage the attackers and return fire, as reflected in Jung's recent comment that "we will fight whoever attacks us." According to MOD contacts, the "pocket card" that every soldier carries as a reference guide on proper rules of engagement is currently being updated and simplified, and will reflect these changes.

111. (C) To support more robust operations, the Bundeswehr is employing additional military equipment and capabilities. Bundeswehr Inspector General Schneiderhan briefed the Bundestag Foreign Affairs Committee late last month that four Marder infantry fighting vehicles, already forward-deployed in Mazar-e Sharif, would be moved to Kunduz. The Bundeswehr is also deploying the night-capable tactical KZO UAV to

improve its battlefield intelligence capability. Schneiderhan told the committee that German tactical commanders should not hesitate to ask for CAS when necessary. Surprisingly, none of the parliamentarians objected, with all agreeing that commanders should do whatever required to protect the lives of German soldiers. In fact, far from protesting, SPD Defense Policy Spokesman Rainer Arnold wondered why the Bundeswehr had not yet deployed attack helicopters to Afghanistan. (The short answer is that Germany has no attack helicopters to send -- the Tiger attack helicopters that Germany has ordered from Eurocopter are not expected to be deployable until 2011.)

REACHING THE LIMIT ON GERMAN MILITARY ENGAGEMENT

¶12. (C) With the approval of the AWACS deployment and the pledge of 50 million Euros for the ANA Trust Fund in 2009, German officials have made it clear to us that there will be no additional military-related contributions to Afghanistan before the September 27 Bundestag election, and probably none before both ISAF and AWACS mandates come up for renewal in December. The expectation is that the ISAF and AWACS mandate will be combined into one at that point, with an overall troop ceiling of perhaps 5,000 (the current ISAF troop ceiling is 4,500, while the AWACS authorization is 300).

¶13. (C) In response to our questions about what more Germany might be prepared to do militarily once this political season is passed, German officials have cautioned us about having high expectations. Our MFA contacts have indicated, in fact, that 5,000 might be the end point for the long, slow build-up in German forces we have seen over the past few years. CDU Defense Policy Spokesman Bernd Siebert has recently made similar remarks in public about soon "reaching the limit" on the number of German military forces that can be deployed to Afghanistan. While there is a willingness to explore the idea of German forces being more active in western Afghanistan, especially since that is the route for insurgents infiltrating the north, that would have to be done largely within the current German troop limit. Otherwise, German ground forces are likely to remain predominantly deployed in the north.

COMMENT: EVEN LESS FLEXIBILITY UNDER CDU/CSU-FDP

¶14. (C) Ironically, the political space to do more militarily in Afghanistan could be even more limited under a center-right CDU/CSU-FDP coalition that may emerge after the September election than it is now under the Grand Coalition. A CDU/CSU-FDP coalition majority in the Bundestag would be much narrower, and the Chancellery expects that the SPD would

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become much more critical of the Afghanistan deployment once it is freed from the constraints of government. There is already a political consensus here that the international military engagement in Afghanistan needs to be balanced by a more robust civilian effort, in line with the new U.S. AF/PAK strategy. Therefore, we are likely to find whatever government coalition emerges after the September election to be relatively open toward making additional contributions on the civilian side (i.e., providing development aid, supporting judicial reform, deploying police trainers, etc.), but significantly less willing to contemplate deploying additional combat troops or widening their area of operation outside the north.

Pollard